

# THE TIMES

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## MI5 to investigate weaknesses in defence security

By Philip Webster, Political Reporter

The Government has ordered the Security Service (MI5) to conduct a comprehensive overhaul of security inside the Defence Intelligence Staff after an investigation by the Security Commission, which produced its report yesterday, disclosed weaknesses and inadequacies in present arrangements.

Security failings inside the Ministry of Defence's intelligence operation came to light as the commission inquired into the case of a young lance corporal in the Army Intelligence Corps who attempted unsuccessfully to pass secrets, gained while on temporary secondment to the Ministry, to the Russians.

In its report to the Prime Minister the commission, chaired by Lord Bridge of Harwich, expressed concern over a "general laxity of approach" in the DIS to restricted positive vetting certificates.

It also raised questions over the rules governing the destruction of classified documents and the complex security instructions given to staff, and made clear its view that an internal investigation by the Ministry since the case had been inadequate.

The critical commission report came on the same day that the Ministry admitted that British military secrets had fallen into "unauthorized" hands in Cyprus.

This followed allegations that young soldiers had been black-

mailed into giving information.

Lord Treigarn, Under-Secretary for the Armed Forces, said in a letter to a Labour MP that it now seemed likely that classified information has been passed to unauthorized recipients. Investigations were continuing and it was too early to assess the significance of the matter and what charges would be made.

Mrs Margaret Thatcher last night announced the Government's acceptance of the commission's recommendation for a review of protective security in the DIS. About 1,000 staff are employed there, gathering technological, economic and military intelligence from the Soviet block.

The Government has also accepted the commission's general recommendations, which will apply to all government departments, the security and intelligence agencies and the armed forces.

These were: that guidance should be issued on the employment of holders of restricted positive vetting certificates, with special consideration to the circumstances in which people under 21 are allowed access to top secret material; that rules governing destruction of documents be reviewed; that security instructions be written in clear and unambiguous terms.

The commission investigated the case of Philip Aldridge, who was sent to prison for four years at the Central Criminal Court in January, 1983. He had stolen a

secret document, believed to be a weekly assessment produced by the Joint Intelligence Committee, while seconded for two weeks in August, 1982, to a small section in the DIS covering intelligence from Argentina after the Falklands war.

The court was told that Aldridge made contact with the Russians through coded messages in the personal columns of the *Daily Telegraph* in which he was referred to as "Spider" and the Soviet Embassy as "Mum". He was unmasked when various telephone numbers for the Soviet Embassy were found in his diary by his commanding officer.

Although the commission concluded that Aldridge's attempts to sell secrets were frustrated, it found that an undoubted breach of security gave him the opportunity to remove the document.

Aldridge had restricted positive vetting clearance because he was under 21, which should have meant that he had access to secrets only on a "need to know" basis and under strict supervision.

● The Government has begun to operate a tougher, more intensive system of security screening for officers in Whitehall's secret services, in an attempt to reduce the chance of KGB penetration. (Peter Hennessy writes)

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## Overhaul of defence security

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in the process of adopting a practice used by the CIA known as "neighbourhood inquiries". That involves an examination of the background of an intelligence official by Whitehall investigating officers in which neighbours and acquaintances are asked questions about the individual's character and social habits.

Security officials in MI5, in the secret intelligence service, MI6, and the Government Communications Headquarters have already started using the neighbourhood inquiry technique as a part of their positive vetting procedure.

In the past, only character referees nominated by the official under investigation were interviewed although something comparable to neighbourhood inquiries has been applied to for example those engaged in the operating of the nuclear

# spy ring inquiry

By BRIAN SILK

THE Government admitted yesterday that a spy network has been using a group of British Servicemen to penetrate the secret communications centre on Cyprus.

Lord Trefgarne, Under-Secretary for the Armed Forces, disclosed that "a number of personnel" were being questioned about alleged leaks of classified information from the island's listening post, which is in direct contact with GCHQ at Cheltenham.

The Director of Public Prosecutions' office also confirmed that it had sent a representative to Cyprus and his report is awaited.

Following Lord Trefgarne's statement, the Ministry of Defence refused to specify how many Servicemen were under suspicion.

But a spokesman dismissed the suggestion that between 30 and 40 were being questioned. "It is a very small number, literally a handful," he said.

However, the fact of a spying operation involving more than one isolated leak is bound to contribute to the alarm already raised over the security situation at Cheltenham.

## Highly sensitive

The centre on the east coast of Cyprus, between Larnaca and Famagusta, monitors highly sensitive diplomatic and military traffic passing through the turbulent Middle East.

Access to such information is considered to be of high value to the Arab world, as well as the Soviet bloc.

Lord Trefgarne's statement came in a letter to Mr Ted Leadbitter, Labour MP for Hartlepool, who had raised the issue with him.

It was Mr Leadbitter who tabled the question which led to the identification of the traitor Anthony Blunt in November, 1979.

Lord Trefgarne's letter to him states: "Our personnel are more at risk in a place such as Cyprus and we go to considerable lengths to remind all of them to be most careful about security at all times."

"In spite of these precautions it now seems likely that classified information has been

leaked to unauthorised persons. We are still in the

BRIAN SILK

# Cyprus spy inquiry

midst of investigations and a number of personnel are assisting with inquiries.

"While these continue it is rather too early to assess the significance of the matter and what charges will be made."

Concern about security at the Cyprus centre arose last month after it became known that a senior aircraftsman was being questioned about the unauthorised disclosure of information.

He had been picked up by a woman in an island discotheque and then offered sexual favours in return for information.

The airman reported the matter to his superiors and this led to suspicion that a "Mata Hari" spy system might be in operation with British Servicemen as the target.

A number of Servicemen under suspicion are understood to have been sent back to the U.K. where they have been

interviewed by Special Branch officers. The possibility of Servicemen being blackmailed for information following homosexual indiscretions is also believed to be scrutinised.

Mr Leadbitter said: "Cyprus is an important strategic base and a very important listening post of the Cheltenham kind in that part of the Mediterranean."

"I look upon this letter as signifying the gravity the Ministry of Defence attaches to the revelations because there is already at this stage an admission that classified material has been passed to unauthorised people."

The Ministry of Defence last night refused to give any information about the number of men employed at the Cyprus communications centre. They are believed to be mainly Royal Air Force personnel.